



Underground
Toilets on
Market Hill
and
Newmarket
Road.

Cambridge SEWAGE Chronicle, by Mike Petty
Includes public toilets

1890

1893

Sewers started in Coldham's Lanes & Victoria Road [1.1]

1895

Main sewage scheme in full flow involving deep sewers & new pumping station at Cheddar's Lane, streets choked by work, much grumbling [1.2, 1.19]

1897

Discover new sewage scheme inadequate & needs vertical shafts at great additional expense (ratepayers protest at costs and throw out proposals to rebuild Guildhall) [1.3]

1897 10 12

Sir - The poisonous exhalations from the ventilating gratings in the Cambridge streets continue as bad as ever. The authorities apparently neglect to make any effort to mitigate the intolerable nuisance, and seem to court an epidemic of diphtheria and typhoid. Having occasion myself to pass along Castle-street and the Huntingdon-road I can testify to the particularly offensive conditions. Nausea, headache, sore throat, and a general low state of health are some of the minor results of the pestilential state of the town. The constant use of disinfectant in the streets might do something to diminish the dangers with which we are threatened - a Resident M.A. 1897 10 12

1897 10 23

Sir, - On Wednesday morning my attention was called to the state of the River Cam near Baitsbite Sluice. The water was covered with an oily matter and the stench arising therefrom was beastly. The whole atmosphere was apparently impregnated with some vapour. The havoc amongst the fish was appalling. Thousands upon thousands - I might say tons - of pike, eels, roach and dace were dead and

dying, struggling to liberate themselves from their putrid, poisonous liquid. I never witness such a lamentable sight before - Thomas Banyard 1897 10 23

1897 11 15

The Cambridge public may rest assured that though there may be a great nuisance from smells yet there is very little chance of their being harmful to health. We have found out that in some of the worst cases it is due to the sewer taking away the wash from the college kitchens and everyone knows what green water smells like. It has been noticed that the smells are more particularly unpleasant when the kitchens are being washed up. That is probably one of the chief causes in the greater part of the borough of smells from the fresh sewage 1897 11 15

1897 12 09

Fred Morley called the attention of Cambridge Council to the state of the new sewers. He thought it was time people were protected from the smells which at present arose from them. The worst of them arose where three or four streets joined and the tradesmen at the corner of the streets were in a worst position than those in the middle. They were losing customers who went where there was not so much smell and one butcher said the smells had affected the colour of the meat in his shops. Further people thought it was the meat that smelt and not the manholes (Laughter) 1897 12 09

1898 01 06

On Sunday last the inhabitants of Castle End, Cambridge, were surprised by a violent explosion, and were anxiously searching for its whereabouts. It was noticed that at the time of the explosion the grating over a manhole in the street was lifted up several inches. The explosion was, undoubtedly, in the sewer. It is said that there has been an objectionable smell of coal gas in the neighbourhood, so a leakage may have taken place into the sewer. Cambridge people will soon begin to regard the sewers as something more than a nuisance - a positive danger - and expect the streets to be upheaved as by a subterranean mine 1898 01 06

1899 02 16

Mr Slingsby drew the attention of Cambridge council to the want of public conveniences. He thought the present state of affairs was a disgrace and a scandal to this civilised and intellectual town. They should consider underground lavatories for males and females at Hyde Park Corner (under the shelter), Market Hill (under the Conduit) & at the junction of East Road and Newmarket Road 1899 02 16

1900

1901

Underground toilet built at Hyde Park corner [1.4]

1902 11

Underground toilets under construction on Market Hill are raided by undergraduates seeking wood for bonfire to celebrate peace at end of war South Africa June 1902

1902 11 14

A piece of work, involving operations similar to those by which the "Tube" railway was constructed, is on the point of being finished, having been in progress for nearly twelve months. It is the sewer connecting the New Cemetery with the Sewage Farm, Cambridge. Its length is over a mile and in some places it is laid to a depth of 24 feet. The greater part of the work has been done by the "tunnelling" system and carried out entirely by Cambridge men under the supervision of the Borough Surveyor CDN 1902 11 14

1903 08 10

Sir – whatever may be said about slums, in Whitechapel you could go into any house in the poorest district but you would find a flushing cistern to every w.c., and that is more than you can find in Cambridge. When we had the sewers put in the Corporation tried to have the flushing cisterns put in

but they were ruled out by the objections of the large property owners. Until these matters are remedied we shall always be in trouble, either with this epidemic of some other – Ratepayer 03 08 10

1904 05 09

The Association of Managers of Sewage Disposal Works inspected the Cambridge pumping station destructors where all kinds of refuse turned out from households daily, sweepings and other undesirable matter is tipped into huge trucks and burnt, giving off heat used whose steam is used to pump sewage. During winter months some 40 tons of refuse is burned each day. The disinfectant was examined with interest; it was installed in 1902 and during the smallpox of 1904 was of great service in disinfecting a great number of articles using super-heated steam. They then moved to the Corporation sewage farm, Milton Road, for a practical demonstration of sewerage analysis 04 05 09

1905 02 23

Serious allegations have been made against the sanitary administration of Cambridge in a letter to 'The Times'. As that newspaper reaches but a small section of the burgesses it would normally have been reprinted in the columns of the C.D.N. We were, however, requested by the Town Clerk not to give publicity to the complaints until a reply had been given. But now we can print both. The manner involved a furnished apartment in which a child died from diphtheria. Finding the apartments to let 'The Times' journalist took them. She claimed it had not been disinfected and a survey showed very serious defects in the W.C. between the two bedrooms. 05 02 23

1906 03 28

Dr Bushell Anningson has served as Cambridge Medical Officer of Health since 1875. Then the whole sewerage was most unsatisfactory and 800 houses in Sturton Town had only middens and cesspools. 2,000 houses had no water supply other than pumps or wells – in many cases contaminated with sewage – and there were no arrangements to cope with a serious epidemic. Household refuse was collected by private individuals who did the work for what they could get out of it. They used donkey carts which were emptied in their own backyards in the neighbourhood of Gas Lane where it was examined for saleable material such as bones and cinders. 06 03 28a

1906 06 14

Cambridge water supplies might be polluted from sewage from Cherry Hinton and Fulbourn. Householders use pails for the collection of excreta and if this is spread on the land then the possibility of typhoid organisms finding their way into the water supply must be remote. A more serious menace is the soakage of infected matter from improperly-constructed cesspools and the sewage from the Asylum. Some Cambridge people have started to boil their water. 06 06 14a & b

1906 10 04

An extraordinary sight, which ought never to occur again, is to be witnessed at Baitsbite Lock. For a hundred yards the surface of the water is literally covered with dead and dying fish – pike, roach, bream, dace and a host of smaller fry. Fishermen would never have dreamed there were as many fish in the waters. They have been slaughtered by the introduction of some noxious substance into the river. 06 10 04 & a

1907 09 28

Sir – the cartage of the sewage filth into Milton is again in full swing. Considering the outbreak of fever at the Hospital and at Cherry Hinton everyone must agree this is a terrible risk to run and it should be stopped. Crude sewage was run as usual on Sunday down a ditch to Baitsbite Lock which should supply the lower fen with pure water. This is within a few feet from where the University boats start, and would hardly commend itself to rowing clubs – 'Ratepayer' 07 09 28

1911

River Cam fish poisoned possible by sewerage [4.2]

1912

Borough council byelaw re siting wcs etc [NI.3.4]

1912 02 02

A conference on rural water supplies heard that many villages are supplied with drinking water from shallow wells just a few yards from a leaky cesspool or privy-pit. These often leak: the emptying of such receptacles is very unpleasant work and if they are made water-tight needs doing more frequently so it often happens that a crowbar is used to make a water-tight cesspool leaky. The roofs of average village cottages are scarcely desirable gathering grounds for drinking water but often the water thus collected and stored underground is infinitely safer than from wells and being soft is usually preferred for use in tea making and cooking 12 02 02a Constance Cochrane evidence – 12 02 02b

1913 07 04

The automatic boxes on the doors of a number of Cambridge public conveniences have been rifled lately, the last to receive attention being the convenience on the corner of Mill Road and Hyde Park corner. One attendance is in charge of several of these places and the thefts have been committed during his absence 13 07 04 p7 CIP

1915 11 24

A. Sidney Campkin – profile – council involvement, includes sewage disposal scheme 15 11 24a,b,c Ch

1916 07 01

Half sewage passed into river untreated, resignations from committee;

1916 07 08

Due lack of care when laid pipes crack & water gets in from soil, but has transformed Cambridge from damp place to dry & healthy - few years ago impossible to dig down seven feet without hitting water, now 20 feet, mists stopped [2.2]

1916 07 29

Flooded state sewage farm due to experiments to see what possibilities; daily flow two million gallons, can dispose of only two 10 07 29 [2.3]

1917 10 24

Sewage farm overworked – result of examination; present plant is sufficient, improvements suggested – 17 10 24a

1918 08 07

The effluent from the Corporation sewage discharge pipe, just below Baitsbite most impure, even containing crude sewage, which badly pollutes the river and the effluvia from which is most obnoxious 18 08 07 CIPof

1919 08 06

Sewage in Cam; reports says pollution in river near sewage farm. More land needed for filter beds, German labour had been asked for; hope that profits from growing crops will pay for disposal of sewage – 19 08 06e

1920

1926 04 26

An inquiry was held into the provision of two underground public conveniences at the junction of Milton and Chesterton and Newmarket and East Roads where there would be an island in the middle of the road. The Inspector asked whether they had designed the roof to carry the weight of a heavy motor lorry; it would be a very simple matter for a lorry to jump a kerb on a foggy night as had happened at Southend when people had been injured. He also raised the question of a convenience for

women and the Mayor said the matter had been very carefully considered by the committee who were anxious to get on with the work as quickly as possible 26 04 26

1926 06 24

Councillor Briggs said he was very pleased the Committee were raising the wages of men working at the Cambridge Sewage Farm by about one farthing an hour. He remembered when there was skating on the farm the chairman said it was dangerous, because there were germs about. (Laughter). These men were there daily and were engaged in a dangerous occupation, and a very unpleasant one. The men got 38s. (£1.90) a week, and extra for sludge work. They had the best of conditions. (Laughter). They had a shed which they ran into when there was a shower. What better conditions could they have? The rate for farm labourers was 30s a week 26 06 24

1930

1936 06 25

Councillor Wilding asked if the new sewage plant would prevent "the effluvia we all notice so strongly along Milton Road" and if not, whether consideration would be given to the moving the works further from the road. Lately the smell had been terribly bad, although people in the neighbourhood got used to it. The Mayor said he was frequently at the farm and never smelt anything which could be described as "terribly bad". Mr Edwards remarked, amid laughter, that he thought the Mayor should receive nasal attention 36 06 25 & a

1939 06 27

Cambridge has expanded but the sewage disposal plan has remained practically unaltered. People were invited to the opening of the new bacteria beds which will treat half the dry-weather flow and can be expanded later. 39 06 27

1940

1948 11 02

Pollution of the river Cam above Baitsbite Lock which resulted in thousands of fish dying was described at a meeting of the Federation of Anglers as "appalling and dreadful". Mr C. Baxter stated that on Wednesday evening the lock was "absolutely clogged" with fish of every conceivable type, not dead, but on top of the water, gasping. 2nd November 1948

1949 07 28

Cambridgeshire federation of anglers were told there were thousands of fish in distress in the River Cam near Jesus Green footbridge on July 15th. The lock keeper opened the locks to let them through. Unfortunately a lot of the fish were dead, but there was no doubt that thousands were saved. Many big fish were taken in nets by men and placed in water downstream. Many dead fish had since been seen further downstream and Major Gordon Fowler said there were dead fish "as far as the eye can see" 28th July 1949

1949 11 22

People passing over Magdalene Bridge this morning were surprised to see the usual colour of the River Cam had changed to a bright green. The discoloration extended from the bridge along the Backs of the colleges and beyond. It will be recalled that following a discoloration of the Cam last year – not then green – a public meeting of protest was called by the Federation of Anglers. 22nd November 1949

1950

1950 05 03

Sir – It is with dismay we hear the Cambridge council's decision to defer the provision of outside lavatories for four-bedroomed council houses. Most of these have many occupants, in one case 14 in one house. Imagine the congestion and also the wear and tear of stair carpets; also think of the mother with several small children, up and down stairs, especially on wet days. Had the lavatory been built outside in the first place there probably would have never been an application for an extra lavatory.

Our estate is a very pleasant place. What we have asked for is a vitally necessary thing – S.A. Charge, Trumpington Estate Tenants Association 50 05 03

1952 07 29

Sir – I write to protest against the proposed new public conveniences on the corner of Chapel Street & High Street, Chesterton. There are plenty of old men who like to congregate on the iron seat around the ash tree, for even with the existing police box it is undeniably a pleasant corner such as it will never be with a lavatory right in the middle. But there are numerous condemned cottages in the High Street and extensive rubbish dumps behind crumbling walls, not only unsightly but filthy, which would be improved for having public lavatories built on them – Mrs M. Sugden

1954 05 01

Government Inspectors have turned down an application from Cambridge city council to build a public convenience on the island at the junction of High Street and Chapel Street, Chesterton. It is the site of the old village green and in its centre stands a fine old ash tree encircled at its base by a seat much used in summer evenings. The Council contended that only five houses overlooked the site and they would improve the island with a cycloramic wall and flowers. But the Preservation Society said it would destroy the pleasantest survival of Old Chesterton and there were three alternative sites.

1956 04 26

Since the Cambridge sewage purification works at Milton Road were first built, over 60 years ago, treatment has consisted of settlement in tanks followed by passing the sewage to land areas from which is drained into the river. Now new extensions are being built, all sewage will be properly purified and land treatment will be ended for ever. At a later stage gas driven off during the drying process will be burnt to drive electricity generators for the works and for a new pumping station at Cheddars Lane. 56 04 26a

1956 06 29

Something must be done about the 'intolerable stench' from the Milton sewage farm; the recent smells were the worst for 24 years; perhaps disinfectant could be used to tone them down. Farmers wanted a plant to convert the sewage sludge into compost – many were buying it from places like Manchester 56 06 29c

1957 04 16

The central island containing the underground public convenience at Hyde Park Corner is to be removed to make way for new traffic signals. The toilets might be resited on Lensfield Road where trees and a fence will provide a screen from the Scott Polar Research Institute. But the University suggests that Parker's Piece would be a better location. 57 04 16a

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 11 04

The original pumping machinery at Cheddars Lane sewage station is still in use today with its pumps driven by steam operated engines. Until the war the city's combustible refuse was employed for supplying the engines with steam, boosted slightly by coal or coke. Then the calorific value of refuse dropped to such an extent that it did not do the job efficiently so the system was reversed with steam being obtained from coke boilers to which odd loads of refuse are added. Now a new station will be built running entirely on electricity to be generated from the methane gas produced by the sewage itself at Milton, so completing the circle. 60 11 04a

1960 11 23

The threat of flooding has hung over Cambridge for as long as people can remember. Some residents regularly take up their carpets and pile up their furniture when they go away on summer holiday in case a storm should occur. When this does occur premises, yards and gardens are left with a deposit of sewage and filth. This should not be tolerated, the City Surveyor told councillors. In Abbey Road the

old six-foot high brick sewer has collapsed and been replaced by a pipe only two feet in diameter. A five-year improvement scheme incorporating a new sewage pumping station would cost £1.5 million. 60 11 23

1960 12 02

£1.3M sewage improvement scheme approved, 4.5 miles new pipes Fen Causeway - Halingway; new sewage pumping station combat threats foul flooding & many residents in constant fear of flooding in storms, take up carpets & pile furniture when go on holiday; basis present sewers 1890s [10,3. 11, 3.12]

1962 01 11

Concern pollution effluent gas works [3.4]

1962 06 13

New sewerage scheme plans [1.18]

1964 01 09

A report on the condition of the 24 public lavatories in Cambridge notes a range of minor criticisms concerning the absence of toilet paper and soap or damaged taps. But such essential supplies are replaced every day and are generally as a result of theft. The council is not causal or neglectful but frugal and aims to provide the essentials at the cheapest cost consistent with hygiene standards. Over 80 per cent of repairs are a result of wanton damage, doors have been ripped off and made targets for flick knives, the City Surveyor reports. 64 01 09

1964 04 03

Cambridge city council are to spend up to £2,300 on taking penny slot machines from doors of toilets; they will also install wash basins and hot water supplies in the 24 toilets within the next few months – 64 04 28, major report suggest 4 are obsolete - Milton Road, King St, Newmarket Road & Petersfield [3.1,3.2]

1965 07 22

Water & sewage floods as clouds burst over city [3.13]

1967 12 06

New sewer will lift ban on housing in Cherry Hinton & Shelford areas [3.14]

1968 06 27

Riverside new electric pumping station opened [2.5]

1968 09 16

New sewers save city from floods - no extensive flooding after storm. [4.5]

1968 11 19

Cambridge Society of Industrial Archaeology set up to save Cheddars Lane and develop as museum of technology - 68 11 19a

1968 12 17

New techniques for sewer-laying and new pumping station which will use current derived from effluent – detailed feature – 68 12 17, a

1969 08 16

Newmarket Rd lavatories, seediest, gloomiest & least used, demolished due Chesterton Bridge route [3.3]

1970

1971 03 14

Offer to give away Petersfield lavatories; ladies section had been reprieved but men's closed demolished, are new at Gonville Place [3.3] [3.17]

1971 04 30

Cheddars Lane pumping station to open for steam weekend – 71 04 30a

1971 06 17

Toilet at East Road – Mill Road junction being demolished – 71 06 17a

1973 06 27

Discharge of raw sewage from pumping station kills fish [3.8]

1971 07 10

Cambridge police spy on homosexual's haunts, says Liberal; photos toilets – 71 07 10

1972 09 20

Cost £500,000 bring effluent up to GORA standards [3.16]

1974 04

City lose sewage powers at reorganisation [3.17]

1974 07 12

River Cam "in filthy condition" [3.8]

1974 11 19

Untreated sewage escaped into the streets of Cambridgeshire villages with pumping stations unable to cope with the volume of rainwater. At least 11 pumping stations were overwhelmed. With the pumps unable to get rid of the water fast enough, raw sewage forced its way up through manhole covers into the streets. A South Cambs Health Officer said "The smell doesn't give rise to any health hazard". The heavy rain also meant the sewage would be diluted. Provided people washed their hands before handling food there was very little to worry about 74 11 19

1975 06 11

Eight million gallons of effluent from sewage daily, 7.6m gallons unsatisfactory [3.10]

1975 06 14

The River Cam is not only so polluted as to be a bather's health hazard, but in recent years has had to be artificially aerated to keep fish alive, an Anglian Water Authority spokesman has confirmed. He spoke of children who suffered "diarrhoea and tummy upsets" after accidentally falling into the river in the Clayhithe area, and of skin divers who were ill after a sponsored Cam swim. He agreed that via Milton Road sewage works some 8 million gallons of effluent were going into the Cam daily. 14th June 1975

1975 07 18

Cambridge planners have decided to refuse permission until January 1978 for all major developments in the city – because of the serious overloading at the sewerage works. But because of the general economic situation, the cut-back in private building programmes and the acute shortage of development land anyway the decision is unlikely to have serious effects on the city. A similar ban on development has been operated for nearly a year in the "necklace villages" surrounding Cambridge 75 07 18 c

1975 11 06

AWA object all new major development till sewage works extended, January 1978 [3.17]

1976 03 18

New Lion Yard lavatories cost £22,000 a year to run [3.5]

1976 05 02

The River Cam is so polluted at Waterbeach that people who fall in it suffer from skin trouble and are sick if they swallow any of the water, claimed Coun Hilda Hatley. She said that a special anti-algae paint had been stripped off the bottom of a boat by the water. Councillors agreed the problem was the severely over-loaded Cambridge sewage works. 2nd May 1976

1976 06 22

The annual swim through Cambridge, organised by the Granta swimming club, has had to be cancelled for the first time in about 40 years because of the low level of water in the river Cam. Because of possible pollution problems they dare not risk the health hazards involved but hope to put the event on again next year. Typically 70-75 women and about 80 men would enter the event 22nd June 1976

1976 07 17

Giant oil slicks choked the River Cam following failures in the city's drainage system at the height of last night's storm. Oil poured into the already heavily polluted river as interceptor tanks were overwhelmed by the sudden surge of water and workmen erected booms at points where drains entered the river. It appears the oil could have come from the Garlic Row area and may have resulted from oil which has collected in the drains during the spell of hot dry weather 17th July 1976 [3.13]

1976 12 18

The River Cam is being downgraded from its present status as a top-class river because of its deteriorating condition, mainly due to sewage and oil pollution. Downgrading would be a black mark against the Anglian Water Authority. More money will have to be spent on sewage treatment. Its Scientific Director said there had been an improvement during the past year, but low flow had aggravated the situation. 18th December 1976

1977 02 22

Market Hill lavatories closed during day, reprieved for while [3.7]

1977 04 21

£3M spent improving sewage avoid river pollution

1977 07 29

There are those who say that swimming in the Cam is only marginally less dangerous than going for a dip in an oceanful of sharks. There are others who swim in the river day in, day out and are the very model of health. The two sides met at the annual visit of the City councillors to the slowly decaying bathing huts on Sheep's Green. The Mayor said: "We're told the Cam is polluted. All we can say is: Swim, drink it and kill yourselves. Only don't say you weren't warned" 77 07 29

1978 10 20

Cambridge sewage treatment works have been accused of turning the River Cam into one of the dirtiest, smelliest and most turgid stretches of water in the country. Now the works have been transformed into Anglian Water Authority's pride and joy – almost. It has been their top priority project but has generated fierce controversy with an eighteen-month sewage embargo prompting sharp criticism from local councils anxious to go ahead with development plans. At present the works cope for a population of 120,000, and there is scope for 165,000. But the river itself is already near the top of the Department of the Environment classification for chemical pollution. 78 10 20

1978 11 27

£3M had been spent improving sewage avoid river pollution; AWA found city scheme did not get to root of problem & scrapped; 83 years after first opened Cambridge sewage treatment works £4M

improvement scheme unveiled, cope with up to 200,000; Milton Road land bought 1895 for sewage farm serve 39,000; conversion from farm to sewage treatment works began 1937 but not until 1958 that use of land treatment finally abandoned; prior 1895 dumped straight into river 78 11 20

1981 01 29

The best thing that can happen to anybody who falls in the River Cam is to drown; the alternative is to catch all kinds of horrible diseases, a councillor said. Everything goes into the river, which is one big drain. They would like it to be made safe for bathing but it was impossible to stop chemicals and fertilisers being washed in and would mean higher water rates. 81 01 29

1981 07 14

Thousands of fish die after storm brings pollution, restocking take more than 10 years. Pollution blamed on AWA as Riverside pumping works unable to cope, raw sewage flowed into river at height of storm, 93% total fish stock killed 81 10 01[4.1]

1981 07 15

It is likely to take more than 10 years to restock a polluted stretch of the River Cam in which hundreds of thousands of fish died. Anglers say that fishing in the city has now been entirely wiped out. Around four tons have been removed from the river near Bait's Bite lock but many are still floating. It is feared that as well as causing a smell, the rotting fish could cause further pollution. It is suspected that raw sewage was washed into the river during heavy rain. 81 07 15a

1981 07 16

Drummer Street lavatories are smelly, bits of string helped tie the lavatory chains and the pipes were lagged with sacking. At Park Street there was no paper in any of the cubicles, no soap and no towels. One seat was missing entirely. Valiant efforts are being made to keep the subterranean convenience on the market square clean – you have only to look at the gleaming brass handrail and inhale the disinfectant smell. But I wouldn't want to have to take a child in there, even in an emergency. 81 07 16

1981 10 09

Market Hill lavatories would cost £36,000 to modernise, closed [3.7]

1984 09 22

New lavatories planned Silver St [3.8]

1984 09 22

Pembroke Street is to close to start 'absolutely essential' work in a collapsed Victorian sewer and will be a dead road for 13 weeks. The sewers are blocked in at least three places, probably by fallen brick rubble, and television cameras have been lowered into them. The answer is to replace them with new plastic pipe but this would be a long and expensive business and the city council does not have the money. Pembroke College and other people in the area are having to use restricted toilet facilities and Carter's Shoes, Pembroke Gifts, Alf Droy sports and Henry's tea and coffee shop are up in arms. 84 09 22

1986 12 01

"Sewers cannot cope with extra building" [4.3]

1987

Mill Road crater caused by sewage pipe break 'are 12 collapses a year in Cambridge' [NS3.12]

1988 09 07

Sewer collapse closes Hills Rd £CEN 7.9.88

1989 02 17

Sewer repairs to close Silver St for six months øCEN 17.2.89